

Week Ending Friday, March 7, 1997

The President's Radio Address

March 1, 1997

Good morning. Today I want to talk about what we must do to strengthen our effort to keep drugs away from our neighborhoods and out of our children's lives. First, we must fight drugs before they reach our borders and keep them out of America. This is a battle we must fight together with other nations.

Every year the President is legally required to certify whether other nations are doing their part. Yesterday, I accepted Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's recommendation to certify Mexico, to certify that Mexico is cooperating with us in this fight.

Mexican President Zedillo is fighting a tough, uphill battle against the drug cartels which corrupt Mexico's law enforcement agencies. But President Zedillo has taken brave action, firing more than 1,200 tainted officials, extraditing criminals for the first time, passing tough laws, arresting his own drug czar for corruption. In the past year, their seizures of marijuana, cocaine, and heroin are up, drug-related arrests have increased, and eradication efforts have reached record levels.

Make no mistake about it, Mexico has a serious drug problem. But Mexico's leaders recognize that problem, and they have the will to fight it. We must do whatever we can to give them the means to succeed. Stamping out the drug trade is a long-term battle. It won't be won overnight. We will continue to press our Mexican partners to take tough action that will protect all our people from drugs.

Stopping drugs at their source is a critical part of the antidrug strategy I announced earlier this week. My balanced budget pays for the largest antidrug effort ever. Under the leadership of our national drug czar, General Barry McCaffrey, who's here with me at the radio address this morning, this plan will crack down on drug dealers and

help parents teach their children just how dangerous drugs are. We must give our children the straight facts. They need to hear a constant drumbeat from all of us: Drugs are wrong; drugs are illegal; drugs can kill you. The more children know about how dangerous drugs are, the less likely they are to use them.

Our drug strategy includes an unprecedented national advertising campaign to get out the facts and shape the attitudes of young people about drugs. And we must do more to sever the dangerous connection between illegal drugs and violent crime.

Illegal drugs are involved with the vast majority of violent crimes in America—drug dealers carrying guns, violent criminals on drugs and out of control, gang wars over drug-trafficking turf. One million Americans are arrested every year for breaking the drug laws. Two-thirds of all the men in State prisons have abused drugs regularly.

Unfortunately, most of the people who enter jail as drug addicts leave jail still addicted or about to become addicts again. When criminals on parole or ex-convicts out of jail go back on drugs, the chances are enormously high they will commit new crimes. According to some experts, 60 percent of all the heroin and cocaine sold in America is sold to people on bail, parole, or probation. Two-thirds of prisoners with a history of heroin or cocaine use who are released without treatment are back on drugs within just 3 months. We must break this cycle of crime and drugs once and for all.

Last fall, Congress passed my proposal to require drug testing and treatment for prison inmates and convicts on parole. Our prisons must not be illegal drug markets, and anyone given a chance to go straight and live a better life must be absolutely drug-free. The bill I signed said to the States, we want to continue helping you build prisons, but if you want the money to do that, you must start drug testing prisoners and parolees.

In December, I announced Justice Department guidelines to help States meet this requirement. The guidelines are straightforward. By March 1, 1998, one year from today, every State must submit to the Attorney General a clearly defined, comprehensive plan to test prisoners and parolees, to treat those who need it and punish those who go back on drugs.

Today I'm announcing that I am sending all 50 Governors a letter to make it clear that General McCaffrey and Attorney General Reno are prepared to help every State get this job done. We'll provide guidance and resources, experts, technical assistance, access to new technology. We'll give that to every State that needs help in developing its plans. At the same time, this, too, should be perfectly clear: Any State without a prisoner and parolee drug testing plan one year from today will lose Federal prison assistance until a plan is submitted. We want to help States build the prison space they need, but we will not help to build prisons that tolerate drugs by turning a blind eye.

The Federal Government and State governments must work together as partners to get this done. It's time to say to inmates, if you stay on drugs, you'll stay in jail; if you want out of jail, you have to get off drugs. It's time to say to parolees, if you go back on drugs, you'll go back to jail; if you want to stay out of jail, stay off drugs.

We must fight drugs on every front, on our streets and in our schools, at our borders and in our homes. Every American must accept this responsibility. There is no more insidious threat to a good future than illegal drugs. I'm counting on all of you to help us win the fight against them.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 4:28 p.m. on February 28 in the Roosevelt Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on March 1.

Remarks Prior to Discussions With Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority and an Exchange With Reporters

March 3, 1997

The President. Good morning. I'm glad to welcome Chairman Arafat here. This is our sixth meeting, and I'm hopeful that it will be as productive as our previous ones have. You will remember the last time he was here, last fall, we were facing a very difficult situation with regard to Hebron, and because of the efforts that he made in working with the Israelis, an agreement was reached, a timetable was established, and we're moving forward. And I'm hopeful that we can keep doing that. This is also a difficult moment, but I think we can work through it and go forward and I appreciate his coming to see me.

Middle East Peace Process

Q. Mr. Chairman, are the new settlements designed by the Israelis to make the annexation a fait accompli of east Jerusalem?

Chairman Arafat. Not only for Jerusalem but also for Bethlehem, because their target is to squeeze and to isolate Jerusalem but, at the same time, to build the settlements at the entrance of Bethlehem, to replace Har Homa, our capital—in the city of Bethlehem during the 2,000 years of our celebration for our Jesus Christ.

Q. What are you going to do about it?

Chairman Arafat. I am sure that His Excellency will push for—to prevent it.

Q. Mr. President, what do you think about the settlement?

The President. Well, what I think about the settlement is what I think about all these issues. You know, the important thing is for these people on both sides to be building confidence and working together. And so I would prefer the decision not have been made, because I don't think it builds confidence, I think it builds mistrust. And I wish that it had not been made.